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COMMITMENTS TO ASYLUM

QUESTION OF REPEALING ACT RELATING TO INSANE PERSONS.

Comment Upon Letter of Dr. Richardson by Attorney Duval—Continuation of Phase.

Dr. Richardson, superintendent of St. Elizabeth's Insane Asylum, recently addressed the Secretary of the Interior a letter upon a suggested favorable recommendation by the Commissioners of the District of the proposed amendment to the act regulating commitments to the asylum. The letter was referred to the Commissioners, and by them to their attorney, who had advised the repeal of the act of January 31, 1899, and the re-enactment of the prior procedure of trial by jury on the subject. Today the Commissioners received from their attorney a letter, in which he states that the question of the constitutionality of the present law, which falls to provide for the determination by a jury of the mental condition of a person sought to be committed to an insane asylum, is liable to be raised at any time by one of the numerous persons now proceeding against the rate of six per cent, or by habeas corpus by some one already committed under existing law.

Referring to Dr. Richardson's communication, which was published in The Star at the time, the Commissioners' attorney says the doctor ably discusses the subject from the standpoint of the physician and administrator of the hospital for the insane. Dr. Richardson suggested that when the objection to the present law and the proposed amendment is analyzed it will be seen that this amounts simply to the statement that these are more expensive, and that the proceedings may not be constitutional. He also suggested that to repeal the present law and to re-enact the old method of jury trial would be to take a long step backward.

Information Often Unattainable.

Very properly, says the attorney, Dr. Richardson seeks to secure information which will be of assistance in the treatment of the insane, doubtless a very desirable object, but in a very large percentage of indigent insane cases, some having homicidal tendencies, committed to the institution and for the protection of the public, this information, the attorney believes, is simply unattainable. In most cases, the attorney points out, the person who